NEHRU BAL PUSTAKALAYA

HSUAN-TSANG'S JOURNEY TO INDIA

Belinder and Harinder Dhanoa







HSUAN-TSANG'S JOURNEY TO INDIA

BELINDER AND HARINDER DHANOA

llIustrator
PAULINA DHANOA

NATIONAL BOOK TRUST, INDIA

ISBN 81-237-0166-7

First Edition 1988
Fourth Reprint 2003 *(Saka* 1924)
© Belinder and Harinder Dhanoa,)988

Published by the Director, National Book Trust, India

prologue

Hsuan-tsang was one of a succession of Chinese travellers who came to India in search of Buddhist wisdom. He was dissatisfied with the available translations of the sacred books and, at the age of twenty-eight, decided to procure the texts in the original and have the finer points of Buddhist doctrine explained and clarified to him by learned Indian scholars. Hsuan-tsang also wanted to visit the holy land and see the sites where various events in the Buddha's life occurred.

Hsuan-tsang had to brave many dangers and overcome many obstacles to fulfil his ambition. Journeying across vast stretches of desolate desert, and crossing forbidding icy mountains, he finally reached India after numerous adventures.

Hsuan-tsang stayed in India for thirteen years and the descriptions he has left of the places he saw and their inhabitants give us a valuable insight into the India of those days.

This is a record of Hsuan-tsaRg's travels and stay based on his writing.

Chapter I

The Journey Begins

It *was* the autumn of A.D. 630 in China. Hsuan-tsang watched with delight as Mount Sumeru, the Divine Mountain, rose from the middle of the Great Sea. Mount Sumeru was made of gold, silver, beryl and crystal and looked beautiful and grand. He wanted to climb it but the waves around rose high and wild, and there was neither ship nor raft in sight. Hsuan-tsang walked into the waves without a shadow of fear. At that very moment a lotus of stone sprang up under his foot. As he placed his foot on it, it vanished and appeared again in front of him. With this stepping-stone he soon found himself at the base of the holy mountain. But he could not climb its craggy, steep sides. As he gathered his strength to try to leap forward, a powerful whirlwind lifted him to the very top.

Filled with joy, Hsuan-tsang awoke. He took the dream

as a good omen to begin his pilgrimage to the land of the Buddha (India), which lay far to the west of China. He set out at once (rom Ch'ang-an:the capital city. He had only gone as far as Liang-chau when he was requested to stay and explain some of the Buddhist scriptures, for he was already well known for his learning.

Now, Llang-chau was often visited by merchants and Iraders from Central Asia, Tibet and the kingdoms beyond the Pamirs. So men from many lands heard Hsuan-tsang speak on religious matters and were very impressed by his vast knowledge. They returned home and praised him to their rulers. They also spoke of his plans to travel to India to study Buddhism more deeply under the great Indian teachers. Thus people in the most distant kingdoms were prepared to welcome the pilgrim when he passed through their lands.

But in China many laws prevented people from leaving the country. Hsuan·tsang, however. was determined not to be held back by either laws or officials. He went to Liang-chau's most honoured monk and asked him for help. The monk eagerly agreed and sent two disciples to guide Hsuan-tsang on his journey.

Hiding during the day and travelling at night, Hsuan-tsang and his companions arrived at Kwa·chow. This was the last haltmg place in China on the TOad to the neighbouring klOgdom of Hami. Hsuan·tsang moved freely among the people here. and asked travellers and merchants about the western routes which would take him to India.

"At fifty Ii (three li to the mile) to the north is the nver Hu·lu," he was told. "Its waters are always whirling and



flow with such speed that it cannot be crossed in a hoat."

"How do travellers cross the river then?" Hsuan-tsang asked. "There must be a way."

"It can be crossed where it is very narrow," was the reply. "But the river is not the only obstacle in the traveller's way." The speaker paused, and Hsuan-tsang waited anxiously to hear what dangers he must face on his journey.

"There is the Yuh-men Barrier,' the man continued, "and beyond that there are five signal towers. The men who guard these towers keep a vigilant eye that no man leaves China without permission. The towers are a hundred li apart

and in the land between them there is no water. and nothing grows. Beyond this lies the Mo-ho-yen desert and the frontiers of Hami."

Hsuan-tsang's heart sank and for a whole month he tried to think of ways and means of leaving. To add to his difficulties, spIes from Liang-chau told the governor of Hsuan-[sang's plans and instructed him to stop the monk from leaving China.

The governor, however, was a religious man and he secretly showed Hsuan-tsang the instructions. His head high, the monk faced the governor. "I will allow nothing to stand in my way," he said firmly. "Fa-Hien and other monks went to India to seek the great Buddhist Law for the profit of the people. I aim to continue their noble example."

The governor was movcd by Hsuan·tsang's words and tore up the instructions. "You must go immediately for you are not safe here," he said. "There arc many who might stop you."

Hsuan-tsang left the governor, but his troubles were not over. When he returned to his lodgings he found his companions, the two young monks, looking worried.

"What is troubling you?" Hsuan-tsang asked quietly.

"Master," replied one, "there are spies from Liang-chau here. If we are caught crossmg the frontiers we will be severely punished. I am afraid to go any further." HIS voice shook as he spoke. and Ilsuan-lSang saw that he really was very frightened.

"You must choose your own way," Hsuan-tsang said to the young monk. "You aTe free to return, If that IS what you wish." Then he looked at the second monk. The young

man's face was pale and he could hardly sit straight.

"Master," he whispered, "I would go with you but..."

Hsuan-tsang put his hand on the monk's forehead. It was hot and dry. "You are ill and weak," he said. "You cannot make such a long and difficult journey. Stay here until you are better and then return to Liang-chau."

Hsuan-tsang left his companions sadly. He went into a temple, bowed before the image of the Buddha and prayed



fervently, begging for a guide who would lead him safely past the frontier barriers. Just then a foreigner, a man from the West, came into the temple. When he saw Hsuan-tsang, he saluted him by circling him three times.

"My name is Bandha," he said. "I want your permission to take the Five Vows to become a lay disciple."

He took the vows and saluted Hsuan-tsang once again. The monk saw that Bandha was both intelligent and strong, and told him that he needed a guide on his journey to the West.

"I will take you past the five signal towers," assured Bandha. "I know the way well enough and you will need no other guide."

At sundown the next day, Hsuan-tsang rode to a nearby thicket. He was light of heart as he waited for Bandha, who appeared shortly after. Riding beside him was an old man, mounted on a lean, reddish coloured horse. They dismounted and Bandha brought the old man forward. "He has travelled to and from Hami more than thirty times," he told Hsuan-tsang, "and knows the routes better than any man alive."

The old man's face was grim as he looked at Hsuan-tsang. "The western routes are difficult and dangerous," he warned. "Sometimes streams of sand block the way, and at others, demons and burning winds attack you. Nobody can escape them. It will be much worse for you sir, going alone. I beg you to think it over seriously. Do not play with your life."

But Hsuan-tsang was not to be deterred. "Until I reach the country of the Buddha," he vowed, "I shall never turn



eastwards [or China. If I should die on the way, I will not regret it."

"Master," said the old man, seeing that the monk would not be moved, "since you are determined to go, you must take my horse. He is strong and has done the journey to Hami many times. He knows the route well. Your horse is weak and will never reach there.'"

Looking at the horse closely, t-1suan-tsang felt a stirring of excitement. An astrologer in Ch'ang-an had told him that he would leave for the western world on just such a horse- red-coloured, skinny and old, with a varnished saddle bound in front with iron. He accepted the offer gratefully and gave the old man his horse in exchange

Chapter [[

A Difficult Task

When his luggage was packed, Hsuan-tsang mounted the old horse and left Kwa-chow. With Bandha at his side, he rode through the night and finally reached the river. Far in the distance they could see the Yuh-men Barrier. When they were about ten li from it, they saw that the river was not more than ten feet wide at that point. Bandha dismounted and began to cut long strips of wood from the trees growing nearby. When he had enough, he made a bridge and spread branches over it, filling the gaps with sand. They then led the horses over to the other side of the river.

Both men were tired after their long ride, so they spread out their mats and lay down to rest. Hardly had they put their heads down when they were fast asleep.

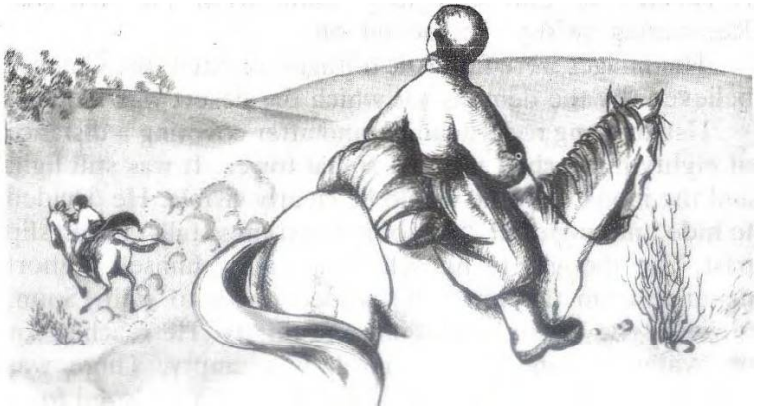
The next day they had gone but a short distance when

Bandha stopped suddenly. "I can go no further," he said curtly.

"Why Bandha?" asked Hsuan-tsang puzzled. "What's the matter?"

"I have important family matters to attend to," Bandha replied in a surly voice, looking away from the searching eyes of the monk. "Moreover, I am not willing to break the laws of the country."

Hsuan-tsang was very disappointed. But when Bandha pointed out the dangers ahead and tried to persuade him to abandon his plans, Hsuan-tsang said, "Though they may cut up my body into pieces as small as dust, I will never return. I have taken an oath on this." And he watched silently as Bandha turned his back and galloped away, leaving him alone in the desert.



"I must go on," Hsuan-tsang thought. "I cannot turn back now and locate another guide." He urged his horse forward, finding his way by following the piles of bones and horse-dung along the route.

The sun was shining brightly and soon Hsuan-tsang began to feel hot and tired. There was no shade or shelter in sight where he could rest, so, keeping his head down, he rode on, trying not to think of the hardships ahead.

Looking up suddenly, he saw armed riders in the distance- hundreds of men dressed in fur and felt seemed to have appeared magically. Hsuan-tsang saw camels and horses and standards and lances glittered and shone. Then new forms and figures appeared and, before his very eyes, changed into a thousand shapes.

Hsuan-tsang's heart pounded with terror. Then he heard voices in the wilderness crying, "Do not fear! Do not fear!" It seemed to him that they came from the heavens. Recovering swiftly, he moved on.

The images were fantastic mirages, created, the Chinese believed, by the demons for which the desert was famous.

Hsuan-tsang rode steadily, and after covering a distance of eighty li, reached the first signal tower. It was still light and the monk knew he would be clearly visible. He decided to hide until nightfall. "As soon as darkness falls, I shall slip past," he thought to himself. Concealing himself a short distance from the tower he settled down to wait. Soon, however, he began to feel hot and thirsty. He reached for his water-bag and found that it was empty. There was nothing he could do, so he closed his eyes and dozed for a while. When he woke he was even thirstier. Looking

around, he saw a water-hole close to the tower. Crouching low, he ran towards it. After drinking and washing his hands, he dipped his bag into the water and waited anxiously for it to fill.

Suddenly an arrow whistled past and grazed his knee. A moment later, there was another arrow. Aware that he had been discovered, Hsuan-tsang cried in a loud voice, "I am a priest come from the capital. Do not shoot me!" In a twinkling, soldiers had surrounded him. Between them, they marched him to the commandant of the post.

"So you are the monk," said the commandant. "I have heard a lot about you."



Hsuan-tsang was surprised, for the commandant's voice was kind. He was even more taken aback when the commandant treated him well, and instead of punishing him, pleaded with him to go back. But Hsuan-tsang would not agree to give up his pilgrimage.

"Very well," said the commandant. "If you will not go back, then I shall guide you on your way tomorrow."

The next morning, as soon as the sun rose, the commandant woke Hsuan-tsang and himself conducted him part of the way. He also provided the monk with food and water for his journey and gave him a letter for his cousin, who was the commandant of the next signal tower. "I have told him to help you," the commandant said, bidding Hsuan-tsang a tearful goodbye.

The monk rode tirelessly the whole day and arrived at the signal tower the same night. The commandant received him kindly and did his best to make Hsuan-tsang's stay comfortable. Before Hsuan-tsang set off the next day he advised him, "Go past the next two towers, but keep away from the fifth one. It is held by violent men who will surely try to harm you."

"How can I avoid it?" Hsuan-tsang asked. "It lies on my route."

"From the fourth tower, make your way towards the Spring of the Wild Horses which is a hundred li from there. You can also fill your water-bag there."

Following the commandant's advice, Hsuan-tsang changed direction and entered the Mo-ho-yen desert This stretch of sand and waste measured eight hundred li. and was called the River of Sand. No bird could be seen

overhead, no beast below. Neither water nor plant was visible. Hsuan-tsang tried to follow the directions given to him, but this was difficult in an area where there were no landmarks. He rode on steadily but after covering a hundred li, found that he was lost! He could not find the Spring of the Wild Horses! How long could he wander aimlessly through the desert? He looked around in despair, but all he could see was an endless expanse of sand. His horse stamped his hooves and jerked his neck restlessly, making the monk's water-bag slip and fall to the ground. Hsuan-tsang leapt down after it, but it was too late. As he watched helplessly, his drinking water seeped into the desert sand. He was filled with panic. Which direction should he take? He thought of returning to the last signal tower he had left, then remembered his vow not to turn eastwards until he reached India.' He said to himself, "It is better to die in the attempt to go to the West, than to live by returning to the East."

Taking courage in both hands, Hsuan-tsang turned his horse towards the north-west, praying that he was on the right track. He could see only limitless plains all around and no trace of man or horse. The scene is described thus: "In the night the demons and goblins raised fire-lights as many as the stars; in the day-time the driving wind blew the sand before it as in the season of rain." He also suffered cruelly from thirst. However, in spite of all these trials Hsuan-tsang's heart remained steadfast.

Full of faith, he prayed, "Hsuan-tsang in adventuring this journey does not seek for riches or worldly profit, he desires not to acquire fame, but only for the sake of the.



highest religious truth does his heart long to find the true Law. I know that the Bodhisattva lovingly regards all living creatures to deliver them from misery! Will not mine, bitter as they are, come to his knowledge!"

Hsuan-tsang travelled for four nights and five days without water. At last at the end of his tether, he lay down on the warm sand. As night drew near, a cool breeze blew over the desert and he found rest in a short sleep. He

dreamt that he saw a mighty Spiritual Being several 'chang' (one chang=141 inches) in height. "Why are you still sleeping and not pressing on with all your might?" said the vision.

Hsuan-tsang awoke and roused himself to fresh effort. His horse also found strength to get on its legs again. When they had gone about ten li, the animal suddenly turned in another direction and after a while carried Hsuan-tsang to several acres of green grass.

Hsuan-tsang dismounted and let his horse graze. They had barely resumed their journey when Hsuan-tsang exclaimed with delight. In the sunlight sparkled a pool of water, bright as a mirror. The monk drank his fill and when both he and his horse were rested and their strength restored, Hsuan-tsang continued his journey, carrying a fresh supply of water and fodder for his horse.

Two days later Hsuan-tsang emerged from the desert and reached Hami.

Chapter III

Captivity

The king of Hami greeted Hsuan-tsang with delight and invited him to stay at the palace, Here, the monk met the envoys of the ruler of Turfan, a larger, richer oasis to the west. When the Turfanese reported to their master that Hsuan-tsang was on his way to India, the king sent an impressive escort to meet him and bring him to the royal city. Though Hsuan-tsang had not planned to visit Turfan, he was now obliged to do so.

After travelling with his escort for six days, Hsuan-tsang reached the borders of Turfan, It was sunset and he was tired. "We shall stop here for the night," he said to his companions, "and ride into the city in the morning."

The words had hardly left his mouth when a rider came galloping up. "The king is waiting for the pilgrim," he announced. "You must ride to the city immediately."

Fresh horses were brought for the travellers. Hsuan-tsang's old, red horse was left behind to rest and follow later. They arrived at the royal city at midnight. The king was informed at once. The city gates were opened, and despite the late hour, the king came out to meet Hsuan-tsang.

The king walked straight up to the monk and put his hand on his shoulder. With a retinue of attendants carrying lighted torches, he led Hsuan-tsang to a seat under a jewelled canopy in an elegant pavilion. "From the time I knew of your honour's name, my happiness has prevented me from sleeping or eating. I was sure you would arrive tonight," said the king, "therefore my wife and children have also kept awake to greet you."

Soon a great feast was in progress. As morning drew close Hsuan-tsang could hardly keep his eyes open. "After a fatiguing journey I have a wish to sleep," he said.

The king bowed to the monk's desire. He returned to his palace, leaving several servants to wait on his guest for what remained of the night.

All was done to serve and make comfortable the man whom the king had decided he wanted to have as the head of the Buddhist church in Turfan. The very next day the king asked Hsuan-tsang to stay on in Turfan, promising him much honour and respect. But Hsuan-tsang refused the offer. "I must go to the West to find explanations of the scriptures not yet known outside India," he explained, "so that the people of the East may also benefit from the knowledge."

But the king was not used to having his wishes denied.



"The Ts'ung-Ling mountains may fall down," he declared, "but my purpose will remain unchanged." And so the will of the monk and the king clashed.

First the king tried to bribe Hsuan-tsang to stay, offering him untold riches but the monk was not tempted and refused. The king then threatened him, "I have another way of deciding the question," he said angrily. "If you think that you can go when you like, know that I can keep you here by

force, and send you back to your own country. Think it over. It will be better for you to obey me."

"I came here for the sake of the great Buddhist Law," Hsuan-tsang replied. "Now I have met someone who opposes me. Your power is only over my body; Your Majesty cannot touch my will or my spirit."

Determined not to be stopped from his pilgrimage, Hsuan-tsang vowed not to eat or drink until the king let him go on his way. Three days passed, and he grew weaker and weaker. On the fourth day the king was overcome with shame and he relented. Bowing to the ground before Hsuan-tsang, he said, "The Master of the Law is free to go to the West. I beg you to eat something."

But Hsuan-tsang still doubted the king's sincerity and asked him to repeat the words with his hand pointing to the sun.

"If it needs be so," said the king, "let us go into the presence of the Buddha and bind ourselves mutually."

Now convinced that the king would keep his word, Hsuan-tsang agreed to break his fast. The king then begged the monk to stop again in his kingdom on his return from India. "I see that you are determined to go on," he said. "But I would like you to delay your journey for a month. While you teach me one of the scriptures, I will have garments prepared for your difficult journey ahead."

Hsuan-tsang agreed to both these requests. The king began to make arrangements for the monk's journey. He knew that Hsuan-tsang's travels would take him through lands with varying climates and that he would require suitable clothes. Among other things he gave the monk

face-coverings, gloves and leather boots.

After a month when all the preparations had been completed, the king bade farewell to the monk. "You must accept these gifts from me," he said, and gave Hsuan-tsang a hundred ounces of gold, thirty thousand silver pieces and five hundred rolls of satin and taffeta, enough for the outward and return journey of the monk over twenty years. As an escort the king sent thirty horses and twenty-four servants, and asked one of his high officials to accompany Hsuan-tsang as far as the next kingdom. To make sure that the monk would be well received, the king sent gifts of fine satin and tafetta and luscious fruits for which Turfan was famous for the neighbouring ruler. And, as a final token of goodwill, he wrote twenty-four letters, each with a roll of satin as a credential, to be presented at the twenty-four countries on the way.

In his long journey across the breadth of Central Asia and over the lofty heights of the Pamirs, Hsuan-tsang was to be ever grateful to the king of Turfan. Because of his thoughtfulness, Hsuan-tsang was able to travel comfortably and in comparative safety.

Chapter IV

Bandits

Going westwards from Turfan, the travellers came to the high Silver Mountain (Kumush Mountain). Hsmin-tsang was curious to know how. the mountain got its name and asked his companions. "Master," explained one of them, "it is called the Silver Mountain because silver is dug out from it to supply the countries to the West with currency."

It was a pleasant journey across the mountains and Hsuan-tsang enjoyed the company of his escort, after his lonely journey through the desert.

On the other side of the mountain, however, they came across a fierce-looking band of robbers who greatly outnumbered the travellers. "They are dangerous men," whispered one of Hsuan-tsang's companions. "We should not cross swords with them. It would be better to give them what they demand and proceed on our way."

Hsuan-tsang accepted this wise advice. The robbers took the money they wanted, and allowed the travellers to go. That evening they camped by the side of a stream, planning to reach the city of Kharashahr the following day. It was a pleasant spot and the water of the stream was fresh and clear. A group of traders joined their caravan and camped beside them.



In the middle of the night when Hsuan-tsang's party was still asleep, the traders wanting an early sale of their merchandise started for the city. A few hours later, Hsuan-tsang and his companions too were ready to leave. They followed the track left by the traders for a few li, when suddenly one of the men who was riding ahead, stopped and shouted, "There's a roll of silk lying in the dust! The traders must have dropped it when they passed this way."

They picked up the silk and rode on. There was a feeling of menace in .the air and they found more of the traders' wares scattered on the road. Grimly and silently they continued on their journey, but as they rounded a curve, signs of a scuffle, and, farther on, piles of colourful clothes lying on the ground, met their eyes.

The travellers spurred their horses forward. The first of them dismounted hurriedly and bent down to pick up the clothes and then stepped back in horror. "It is the bodies of the merchants," he cried hoarsely. "Robbers must have murdered all of them and stripped them of their wealth!"

Shocked, they rode on swiftly to Kharashahr. They did not stay there long but moved on to Kucha, some fifty li farther west. Two days out of Kucha, as they rode on, one of the scouts riding ahead, came galloping back to the party. "Across the next sand dune there is a group of Turkish bandits," he said urgently. "There must be at least two thousand of them, and they have horses!"

At these words, the travellers became terror-stricken. They knew the fate that awaited them if the bandits caught sight of them.

After a little thought, Hsuan-tsang told his companions



to wait and went ahead alone. Hidden by a sand dune, he looked into the bandit camp. They were dispersed over a large area. Gay pieces of cloth, held up by sticks, provided shade and their horses moved about restlessly, looking for any cool spot they could find. The murmur of their voices floated towards Hsuan-tsang, but he could not distinguish the words.

He returned to his companions. "We must avoid them at all costs," he said. "If we turn left from here, the sand dunes will screen us from their gaze."

Without a word, his companions followed his lead. As they tiptoed past, the noise from the bandit camp grew louder. Angry voices drifted towards them. "They are quarrelling," a man whispered to Hsuan-tsang. "They are fighting over the stolen booty."

"We must move quickly," Hsuan-tsang answered, also in a whisper. "We must get away while they are busy squabbling."

The sand muffled their footsteps and they passed the camp unobserved. Suddenly a shout rent the air.

"Run!" shouted Hsuan-tsang. "Don't look back. Run!"

A sharp-eyed bandit had spotted the small caravan. He roused his companions; but fortunately for the travellers, few were willing to give chase.

"Leave them alone," growled one of the bandits, "we have more important matters to attend to."

The travellers rode hard for several li before slowing down and letting their mounts rest.

"We are lucky to have got away," said Hsuan-tsang. "I hope that the rest of our journey will be more peaceful."

Chapter V

Over the Badel Pass

The way West took them over li upon li of desert. They spent day after day among the sand and rocks, occasionally coming across a flourishing oasis, where they rested and filled their water-bags.

Ultimately the desert was left behind and they came to the Ts'ung Ling mountain range. Before them towered icy, forbidding peaks, reaching to the clouds. The travellers thought with fear of the road they must traverse, as they changed into their fur-lined clothes. After riding a short distance they entered the mountainous area. This was a region of icy wilderness where snow which had collected in piles had been changed into glaciers which did not melt, neither in summer nor in winter. Every minute. the going seemed to get more difficult. Wind and snow swirled around them. chilling them to the bone and the dazzling glare of



snow and glaciers blinded them. They also faced a constant danger from avalanches.

There was nowhere they could halt when tired or hungry and Hsuan-tsang feared that they would all perish. Their progress was slow and it would be several days before they found their way out of this arctic area. Finally, they balanced tripods on the slippery ice and placed their pots for cooking and, unable to further ignore their tired bodies, spread their mats on the hard snow.

They took seven days to cross the Badel Pass and fourteen men starved or were frozen to death. The number of horses and oxen that met the same fate was still greater.

It was a sad party indeed that finally arrived at Issik Kul, a great lake (some 1,400 to 1,500 li long). The travellers were greatly relieved when they sighted the lake, for they knew that the most difficult part of their journey was over. They rode eagerly to its shores and even the wildly thr',;;hing waves looked inviting to them after the difficulties . ·d dangers of the mountains,

But, as Hsuan-tsang bent towards the bluish-black water to dip his cup, "Sir, you must not drink from the lake," a voice shouted out. Hsuan-tsang looked up to see one'of his companions running towards him. "Its waters are salty and bitter," the man said. He sat down beside the monk and gave him a drink from his water-bag. After a brief silence the man began to speak. "Dragons and fish swim in the depths of this lake. Sometimes scaly monsters rise to the surface, and then travellers must pray to them for good luck."

"And what about the fish?" asked Hsuan-tsang curiously, "Are they not eaten by travellers?"

"Never," replied his companion, "There are hundreds of fish in the lake, but no traveller would risk fishing for them. It would bring him bad luck and he might not finish his journey."

They sat talking for a while, and when they were rested, set off again, After following the shore for about five hundred li, they saw a huge encampment ahead of them. There were several colourful tents, among which was a large pavilion decorated with golden floral ornaments. It glittered so that it almost blinded the eye,_

"That's Yeh-hu, the Khan of the western Turks. He



comes here often on hunting expeditions," a man explained to Hsuan-tsang. "We can go without fear."

The Khan was delighted to see Hsuan-tsang. He was dressed in a robe of green satin and his hair, which he wore loose, was bound with a silken band some ten feet long, which after being twisted around his head fell straight down. Gathered around him were some two hundred officers,

clothed in robes of brocade, their hair braided. On either side were troops dressed in furs and fine spun woollen garments. They carried lances, bows and standards, and were mounted on horses and camels. Although the Khan was only the ruler of a wandering horde, there was dignity and order in his corripany.

"You must stay here a while," he said to the monk. "We would be very happy to have you with us."

Not wishing to offend the Khan, Hsuan-tsang agreed to stay for a short while., He also-knew that his companions would welcome a rest after the rigours of the journey.



The Khan took the visitors to his own pavilion and had wine passed around while music played. As the evening progressed, the company grew more and more cheerful. After a while food was served but for Hsuan-tsang they provided pure foods such as rice cakes, cream, sugar-candy, honey-sticks and other delicacies.

After the meal, the Khan asked Hsuan-tsang to speak on Buddhism. The company listened in silent awe as the monk preached his religion with great wisdom, yet in simple words. When he had finished, the Khan raised his hands and humbly prostrated himself before Hsuan-tsang. "Sir," he said, "you are indeed a great teacher. But heed my words. Do not go to India. That country is very hot. The tenth month there is as warm as our fifth month. You will be unable to bear the heat. The men there are naked blacks, without any sense of decorum, and not fit to look at!"

,"Nevertheless 'I must go to India," answered Hsuan-tsang, "for there is much to be learnt there." Then he begged the Khan to let him rest *fot* a long journey lay ahead.

The next day, the Khan sent a young soldier with the ,travellers. "He has spent some years in China," said the Khan. "He will serve you as an interpreter as far as Kapisa." . He also presented the pilgrim with several gifts. Then along with his officers, he accompanied Hsuan:'tsang a short part of the way.

Farther on they passed the Thousand Springs, named for its many ponds and springs. "The Khan comes here to escape the summer heat," the soldier informed Hsuan-tsang, as they rode past the springs.

The Thousand Springs was a delightful place and Hsuan-tsang and his companions were sorry to leave it. They came next to a little town of Chinese people who had been carried off forcibly by the Turks. Although they had adopted Turkish dress, they had kept their own language and customs. Then, they had to traverse a great sandy desert, in which the road was swallowed up in a waste which appeared endless, with no sign of water or vegetation.

"We must aim for that mountain," the soldier said, pointing ahead. **In** the distant horizon, the travellers could discern the hazy outline of a great mountain rising from the sands.

"The bones left on the way will show us the route we must follow."

With these grim words ringing in their ears, the travellers began yet another trying phase of their journey.

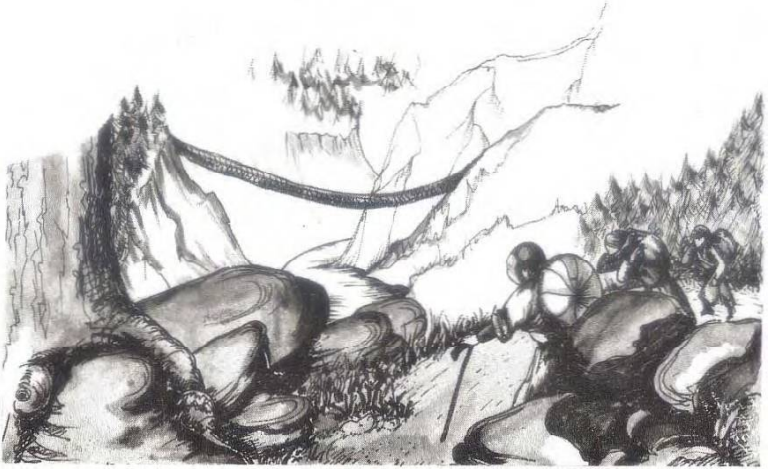


Chapter VI

A Pilgrim's Reward

They travelled swiftly over the desert until they came to the kingdoms of Balkh and Bamiyan. Here, they found that Buddhism was flourishing after its introduction by Kanishka, five hundred years ago. The travellers saw several monuments and relics, among which were Buddha's water-pot, his broom and a tooth, about an inch long, yellow-white in colour. These relics were brought out every feast day and worshipped by thousands of priests and laymen.

The travellers did not tarry, but went on steadfastly, over narrow trails that led over the mountains, along precipices, and over gorges spanned by chain bridges. They were forced to move slowly and were relieved when they entered the Kabul Valley. Here too, Hsuan-tsang found that Buddhism was the prevailing faith. He visited several Buddhist monuments while passing through the country,



but did not stop long anywhere. He was close to his destination now, and was eager to be on his way.

The roads were mountainous again, until, finally, they came to the borders of Kashmir, which they entered by the rocky pass which formed the western approach to the country. At last they had reached India!

In writing about his travels Hsuan-tsang made some general observations about the cities and people of India. He mentions that in the towns, "the shops are on the highways and inns line the roads. Butchers, fishermen, public performers, executioijers, and scavengers have their habitations marked by a distinguishing sign. They are forced to live outside the city and they sneak along on the left when going about in the hamlets." He adds that the floors of houses are, "purified with cow-dung and strewn with flowers of the season."

Talking of dress, Hsuan-tsang states, "The inner clothing and outward attire of the people have no tailoring; as to colour a fresh white is esteemed. The men wind a strip of cloth round the waist and up to the arm-pits and leave the right shoulder bare. The women wear a long robe which covers both shoulders and falls down loose. The hair on the crown of the head is made into a coil, all the rest of the hair hanging down. Garlands are worn on the head and necklaces on the body. In north India, where the climate is very cold, closely fitting jackets are worn.... Most of the people go barefoot and shoes are rare. They stain their teeth red or black."

Hsuan-tsang found a large number of Buddhist monasteries in Kashmir. The king invited the monk to read the scriptures and expound on them and gave him twenty scribes to copy manuscripts which he wished to study.

Of Kashmir, Hsuan-tsang says it was above "seven thousand li (1,400 miles) in circuit, surrounded by high, steep mountains. The district was a good agricultural one and produced abundant fruits and flowers; it yielded also horses of the dragon stock, saffron and medicinal plants. The people wore serge and cotton; they were volatile and timid. They were good looking but deceitful; and were also fond of learning."

Hsuan-tsang spent two years in Kashmir and the time passed swiftly and pleasantly. In the spring of 633, he bade farewell to his new friends, and left Kashmir to visit other important Buddhist centres. He took a leisurely route to the places where the Buddha had preached, stopping at each for a short while.

The pilgrim travelled to Jalandhar and Kulu and then on to Mathura and into the kingdom of Harsha, the most powerful king of north India. Hsuan-tsang noted that Harsha's capital, Kanauj "is a very strongly defended city and has lofty structures everywhere; there are beautiful gardens' and tanks of clear water, and in it rarities from strange lands were collected." And of Harsha, he says, "He was just in his administration and punctilious in the discharge of his duties. He forgot sleep and food in his devotion to good works." Harsha forbade the killing of any living creature and setting the example himself ordered his people to refrain from eating flesh.

Then, coming to the Ganges, Hsuan-tsang boarded a boat carrying some eighty other passengers, to go down the river. After travelling about a hundred li, the banks on either side were covered with the thick foliage of a dense forest.

Unknown to the travellers among the trees on either bank were hidden some ten pirate boats which suddenly darted out and moved swiftly towards the lone vessel. In terror, some of the passengers threw themselves into the river. In a matter of minutes the pirates had surrounded the boat and taking it in tow, brought it to the bank.

They then ordered the men to take off their clothes, and began to roughly strip them of their valuables. The passengers suffered this indignity quietly, for they knew that the pirates would not hesitate to kill them if they protested.

When the pirates had collected their booty of gold and precious stones, they held up their lighted torches and looked searchingly at the fear-stricken faces of their captives.



"They worship the Goddess Durga," a voice whispered. "It is their custom to kill a handsome young man every year and offer his flesh and blood in sacrifice to gain good fortune. They have not found a suitable victim this year."

Hardly were these words spoken when the pirates' eyes fell on Hsuan-tsang. "This young man has pleasing features," they said. "Let us kill him as a sacrifice. It will bring us good luck."

A heavy silence fell over the forest and it seemed that nobody breathed, until Hsuan-tsang spoke. "You may kill me," he said looking directly at the pirates, "but it will bring you misfortune, not good fortune. I have come from a faraway land to worship the Buddha under the Bodhi tree,

to visit the Vulture Peak where he preached, and to study the sacred books and the Law, The purpose of my journey to India has not been accomplished yet and if you, my noble benefactors, kill this body of mine, I fear it will bring you bad luck."

At this, his fellow passengers with one voice begged the pirates to spare him. Several of them even stepped forward and said, "Let us die instead of him. Let him go in peace." But the pirates ignored Hsuan-tsang's words and refused to accept anybody else for their sacrifice. They built an altar in the midst of the flowering grove and plastered it neatly with mud.

Then the captain of the gang commanded two men to take their drawn knives and tie Hsuan-tsang upon the altar. Even when they were about to use their knives to kill him, Hsuan-tsang showed no fear, much to the astonishment of the pirates. Raising his eyes to the cruel faces of his captors, he asked them not to crowd around him and requested a little time to pray.

The pirates were in no hurry and granted the request. As Hsuan-tsang prayed, his concentration was so deep that he forgot the altar on which he was tied and that pirates were waiting to kill him. No one spoke and all eyes were fastened on the man who was soon to die. Suddenly a typhoon rose, struck down the trees and whipped up the river into huge waves, which tossed the boats to and fro. Passengers and pirates cried out in fright, but Hsuan-tsang continued to pray, standing alone on the altar. Completely engrossed, he was unaware of the storm around him.

"Who is this young man?" asked the terrified pirates.



"Where does he come from?"

"He is from the country of China. He is the famous monk who has come in search of the Buddha's Law," replied Hsuan-tsang's companions. "This typhoon, the winds and waves, are but a small measure of heaven's rage if you should kill him. Hasten to repent!"

The pirates dared not hurt the monk then. They untied him hastily and begged his forgiveness. Hsuan-tsang accepted their apologies graciously and his kind words encouraged the pirates to make amends. They threw their weapons into the river, and returned everything they had stolen. As the wind abated and the waves subsided, the pirates took the Five Vows to become Buddhists.

After his adventure with the pirates, Hsuan-tsang

continued on his way until he reached Sravasti, the first of many kingdoms which formed the heart of the Holy Land of Buddhism; it was here that many important events in the Buddha's life took place. The chief town of the kingdom was "mostly a ruinous waste", but there were still a few inhabitants. Hsuan-tsang says that "the people had honest ways and were given to learning and fond of good works."

Among the places Hsuan-tsang visited were the stupa erected over the old foundations of the Great Hall of Law where the Buddha preached. He also visited a tower built on the spot where the Buddha first met his father after having attained Perfect Enlightenment. He then went to Kapilavastu, the country of the Buddha's birth.

This country was without a sovereign, each city having its own chief. The capital was in ruins and had long been deserted although the solid brick foundations still remained. Hsuan-tsang says, "The soil was fertile, and farming operations were regular; the climate was temperate and the people were genial in their ways." Among the remains of over One thousand Buddhist monasteries, Hsuan-tsang saw several Deva temples.

Starting from Kapilavastu, Hsuan-tsang visited the places which were landmarks in the Buddha's life. He faithfully went through forests full of wild oxen and herds of elephants, where robbers lay ili wait to kill travellers. Finally, he came to the kingdom of Kusinagara. Its capital and villages were in ruins and had been deserted. To the north-west of the capital was a grove of Sal trees, whose barks were a greenish-blue and whose white leaves were shiny and glossy. Here, Hsuan-tsang came upon four trees

In pairs of equal height. They marked the spot where the Buddha died, Next to them was a huge brick monastery with a figure of the Buddha, lying with his head to the north, as if asleep. By the side of the monastery was a stupa built by Emperor Asoka. There was also there a stone pillar recording the nirvana of the Buddha, but it carried no indication of the month or year.

The monk then proceeded to Varanasi which was on the banks of the river Ganges. Hsuan-tsang says that the city was very densely populated and the inhabitants "had boundless wealth, their houses being full of rare valuables. The people were gentle and courteous and esteemed devotion to learning." Only a few of them were Buddhists. The climate was temperate, the harvests abundant. "Fruit and other trees grew densely."

Thexe were a hundred or so Deva temples. The majority were devotees of Siva. Some cut off their hair, others made it into a top knot. "Some went about naked and some smeared themselves with ashes.... They practised all sorts of austerities and sought release from mortal existence."

From Varanasi, Hsuan-tsang travelled to Sarnath, where the Buddha had preached his first sermon to his five disciples in the Deer Park. Here the pilgrim says he found a monastery whose "tiers of balconies and rows of halls were extremely artistic.... There are about fifteen hundred priests. In the great court is a temple about one hundred feet high surmounted by an embossed gilt *amra* (mango) fruit. The foundations of the building are of stone and the stairs also, but the towers and niches are of brick. The niches are arranged on the four sides in a hundred

successive lines and in each niche is a golden figure of the Buddha. In the middle of the vihara is a figure of the Buddha made of native copper. It is the size of life and he is 'represented as turning the wheel of the Law (preaching)."

Finally reaching Magadha, Hsuan-tsang found the towns well-peopled. The land was low and moist and the towns were on plateaus. He says, "From the beginning of summer to the middle of autumn, the plains overflowed and boats could be used. The inhabitants were honest, the climate hot, and the people esteemed learning and revered Buddhism." He saw some fifty Buddhist monasteries, and "some tens of Deva temples, and the adherents of the various sects were very numerous."

Here in Magadha was Bodhgaya, where under a pipal tree, the Buddha attained Enlightenment. Hsuan-tsang says that the tree was protected by high and very solid brick walls ' and that in the Buddha's days its height was several hundred feet. But as wicked kings had frequently cut it down, the tree's height was now about fifty feet. It had leaves throughout the autumn and winter and only on the day of the Buddha's nirvana did all the leaves fall off. However, when the day had passed, they all grew again. On this day annually kings, ministers and magistrates, gathered beneath the tree, and poured milk on its roots, lit lamps and scattered flowers. After collecting the leaves they left.

When Hsuan-tsang gazed at the bodhi tree and thought of that moment of Perfect Enlightenment, he could not control his emotions, and threw himself face down on the holy site.

Chapter ***VII***

A Seat of Learning

Hsuan-tsang stayed at Bodhgaya for eight or nine days. Gaya had few inhabitants. There were about a thousand Brahman families, descendants of the original rishi, and these were not subject to the king, and were treated by all with reverence.

While Hsuan-tsang was at Gaya, monks from the famous monastery of Nalanda, heard ot his pilgrimage. Four monks from the monastery came to escort Hsuan-tsang to Nalanda. The pilgrim was happy to go to Nalanda, for he wished to study the doctrines of the Yoga-Sastra under Nalanda's greatest scholar, Silabhadra.

The monastery of Nalanda was entirely enclosed by a brick wall. One gate opened into the great college, and there were eight other halls. Hsuan-tsang says that the buildings had richly adorned towers and fairy-like turrets.

The observatories seemed to be lost in the vapours of the morning, and the upper rooms "towered above the clouds."

Hsuan-tsang was delighted with the beauties of the monastery and described it in glowing terms. "From the windows one may see how the winds and the clouds produce new forms, and above the soaring leaves the conjuctions of the sun and moon may be observed.

"And then we may add how the deep, translucent ponds bear on their surface the blue lotus, intermingled with the Kanaka flower, of deep red colour, and at intervals the Amra groves spread their shade over all.

"All the outside courts, in which are the priests' chambers, are of four storeys. These have dragon projections and coloured eaves, the pearl-red pillars carved and ornamented, the richly adorned balustrades and the roofs covered with tiles that reflect the light in a thousand shades; these things add to the beauty of the scene.

"The king of the country respects and honours the priests, and has remitted the revenues of about a hundred villages for the endowment of the convent."

At Nalanda, Hsuan-tsang was sent to twenty middle-aged monks who were deputed to conduct him to the presence of the elderly Silabhadra. Hsuan-tsang followed their instructions carefully and when he was brought before Silabhadra, he went forward on his knees, kissed the aged monk's foot and bowed his head to the ground. He then faced Silabhadra and spoke in a low voice, "I have journeyed from China to study under you. I hope you will accept me as your disciple."

Silabhadra's eyes filled with tears at these words. "Our

relationship of master and disciple has been foretold in heaven," he said. "For many years I was ill, and the severity of my suffering was so hard to bear that I loathed my life and wished to starve myself to death. Then one night, as I



slept, I dreamt that three Devas, one the colour of gold, another of bright crystal and the third as white as silver, urged me to renew my desire to live. 'There is a monk from the country of China who is eager to understand the Great Law,' they said to me, 'and is desirous to study with you. You ought to instruct him carefully'."

The two monks wasted no time, and began their study straightaway. Hsuan-tsang spent several years based in Nalanda. During this time, he also travelled through the rest of India. He went first to the kingdom of Champa, of which he says, "There were some tens of monasteries mostly in ruins," Samatata where the climate was soft and agreeable due to its proximity to the sea and Tamralipti, which lay along a bay of the sea. He then went along the east coast of Orissa where "the people were of violent ways, tall and of dark complexion," passed through Kalinga where "the people were rude and headstrong in disposition, observant, of good faith and fairness, fast and clear in speech," and went south to Andhra. From here he travelled further south to Dravida, where the "people were courageous, thoroughly trustworthy, and public-spirited." He found more than a hundred Buddhist monasteries and eighty or so Deva temples. This country had been often visited by the Buddha and Emperor Asoka had built several topes to mark the various sites.

Hsuan-tsang then travelled north-west and entered a great forest wilderness infested with wild beasts, until he came to Maharashtra He described the people of this area as being "proud-spirited, warlike, and grateful for favours and revengeful for wrongs. Their martial heroes who led the

van of the army in battle went into conflict intoxicated, and their war elephants were also made drunk before an engagement." He said that they despised death and greatly respected right conduct. As an example, he states that "when a general was sent to wage war, if he was defeated and his army destroyed, he was not punished and tortured but had to exchange his soldier's dress for that of a woman which put him to shame and filled him with sorrow. So much so that frequently the men put themselves to death to avoid such disgrace." Here, he also saw several Buddhist monasteries and monuments built by Asoka. From Maharashtra he passed on to Broach and Malwa, whose people were "polished and agreeable". He then travelled northwards to Sindh, where the "inhabitants were quick-tempered but upright", and as far as the border of Iran. Then, crossing the Indus, he returned to Nalanda.

The monk was an excellent student and took full advantage of the learning at Nalanda. Here he studied the language thoroughly and through discussion with learned men, greatly increased his knowledge. He understood and minutely examined all the collections of Buddhist books and also went through the sacred books of the Brahmans. Later, he wrote proudly of NaJanda's great contribution to Buddhist doctrine and philosophy. "The monks are men of great ability and learning. The rules of the monastery are severe and all monks are bound to observe them. From morning till night they engage in discussion; the old and the young mutually help one another. If outsiders desire to take part in the discussions, the keeper of the gate proposes some hard questions; many are unable to answer and retire. One

must have studied both old and new books before admission."

During his stay at Nalanda, Hsuan-tsang impressed his fellow monks with his vast knowledge and keen powers of understanding. He took an active part in all the debates and discussions of the monastery, and soon his fame spread much farther than the walls of Nalanda.

Nalanda lay in the dominion of King Harsha, but during the years that Hsuan-tsang spent there, he did not have the opportunity of meeting the great king.

When he had completed his studies at Nalanda, Hsuan-tsang decided to return to China. He had started to put together his collection of images and books, when he received an invitation from King Kumara of Assam. The monk respectfully declined Kumara's invitation, saying that he was about to start for home. But Kumara was not one to be refused so easily. He sent another invitation, telling the monk that he could return to China by way of Assam. When Hsuan-tsang turned down his request yet again, Kumara threatened to let the evil part of his nature take over. "If necessary," his next letter warned, "I will equip my army and elephants and sweep down on Nalanda and trample it to dust." He suggested that it would be much better if the monk came of his own will.

"It seems that I must go to Kumara's court," Hsuan-tsang said to his friends in Nalanda. "But I shall leave my precious cargo of books here and try to return once more before I make my journey to China."

He then travelled to Kumara's capital Gauhati, which was on the banks of the Brahmaputra river. The king

showed no signs of his earlier anger. He greeted the monk with reverence and honoured him and did his utmost to make him comfortable. A pleasant month went by. Hsuan-tsang noted that this country was low and moist, and that perennially filled sti-eams 'and tanks flowed to the towns. The people were honest and small of stature, and their speech differed a little from that of mid-India. They were of violent disposition and were persevering students, worshipped the Devas and did not believe in Buddhism. There were no Buddhist monasteries and whatever Buddhists there were, performed their acts of devotion secretly.

King Kumara was a lover of learning 'and his subjects followed his example. Scholars came from distant lands to study here. Although the king was not a Buddhist, he treated all accomplished *sramamis* with respect, and Hsuan-tsang was an honoured guest at his -court.

Meanwhile, King Harsha returned from a military expedition, and was annoyed when he heard that Hsuan-tsang was the guest of King Kumara. He immediately sent Kumara a message bidding him to send the monk to his, Harsha's court. Recklessly Kumara replied saying, "He can take my head, but he cannot take the Master of the Law (Hsuan-tsang) yet."

But soon Kumara became frightened at his own folly. Harsha was more powerful than him, and his army was mightier. Even rulers of far off Kashmir and Sindh were in dread of Harsha. Surely it was not worth risking battle for a monk.

So without wasting a minute, Kumara began to mobilize an impressive escort to take Hsuan-tsang to Harsha. As

thirty thousand boats went up the Ganges, twenty thousand elephants marched along the shores.

At Kanauj, Kumara had a pavilion erected on the shore and leaving Hsuan-tsang there, crossed over to make his apologies to Harsha. The latter, true to his generous nature, was easily placated. He forgave Kumara and overjoyed, looked beyond him and asked eagerly, "I do not see the monk from China. Where is he?"

"Your Majesty is known for his respect for men of virtue and wisdom," Kumara replied gracefully. "I therefore thought that he would prefer to go himself to meet Hsuan-tsang rather than having the learned monk brought here."

• Harsha agreed readily. "That is as well," he said. "You may go now and tomorrow 1 will myself come to him."

But Harsha could not wait until morning. That very night, accompanied by several thousand men carrying lighted torches, he crossed the river to the sound of ceremonial drums, which no other king but he was entitled to. The great king bowed down at Hsuan-tsang's feet, and scattering flowers before him, sang his praises in numerous verses. Then with the monk at his side he returned to his court and entertained Hsuan-tsang to a big banquet, to which Kumara, too, was graciously invited.

Hsuan-tsang noted that the people of Kanauj were well-off, and that there were some families with great wealth. They had a refined appearance and dressed in glossy silk attire. He commented that there were many Buddhist monasteries and more than ten thousand Buddhist brethren who were students of both the Vehicles. There were also



many Deva temples and the non-Buddhists were several thousand in number.

While Hsuan-tsang was at his court, Harsha held an assembly of monks and Brahmans from all over India. A thousand monks from Nalanda, bringing with them Hsuan-tsang's cargo of books, also attended the assembly. Two large thatched buildings were constructed to seat this vast gathering. When they were all assembled, the king asked Hsuan-tsang to preside over the meeting.

All those present were astounded by Hsuan-tsang's profound knowledge. Some who believed in other

doctrines, however, were filled with anger and jealousy and plotted to take Hsuan-tsang's life. Harsha, hearing of this, proclaimed, "If anyone should hurt or touch the Master of the Law, he shall be forthwith beheaded; and whoever speaks against him, his tongue shall be cut out."

During the eighteen days of the assembly, a deep respect and attachment for this wise monk from China grew in Harsha and Kumara.

When the assembly was over, Hsuan-tsang bid farewell to the monks from Nalanda and then went to the two kings to pay his respects in preparation for his homeward journey.

Chapter VIII

The Great Alms Giving

Harsha, however, begged Hsuan-tsang to stay a little longer at his court. "I have established a great religious convocation," he said. "Once every five years I invite all the Brahmans and *sramanas* to attend it. Besides them, I invite the poor, the destitute and orphans and during seventy-five days the distribution of alms called the *Moksha,* is attended to. I have completed five of these assemblies and am about to celebrate the sixth. Why does not the Master (Hsuan-tsang) delay his departure and by witnessing the spectacle, rejoice with us?"

Hsuan-tsang agreed, and the king was delighted. The king then conducted the monk to the kingdom of Prayaga, and proceeded to the great arena where the distribution was to take place. The ground was bounded on the nonn oy the Ganges and on the south by the Jamuna. These two rivers

coming from the north-west and flowing eastward, unite in this kingdom.

To the west of the junction of the rivers is a great plain, some fourteen or fifteen li in circuit. It is flat and even, like a mirror. From days of old, kings have used this spot for charitable purposes, and so it is called the 'Arena of Charitable Offerings'. There is a tradition which says that it is better to give one mite in charity here than a thousand in any other place.

King Harsha had a square enclosure made in the arena for distributing the charitable offerings, and many thatched buildings were erected to keep the treasures of gold, silver, pearls and other precious things. There were also several other store-houses for the silk and cotton garments, the gold and silver money.

Besides these, Harsha had special places where people might eat and rest. The kings of eighteen kingdoms followed Harsha to this spot to distribute charity. When they arrived, they found about five hundred thousand people already gathered.

On the first day they installed the image of the Buddha inside one of the thatched buildings on the field of charity. They then distributed precious articles and clothing of the first quality, and offered exquisite meats, whilst scattering flowers to the sound of music.

The second day they set up the image of Aditya-deva and distributed precious things and clothing to the extent of half the amount of the previous day. On the third day the image of Isvara-deva was put up, and gifts given as on the day before.

And so it continued until the accumulation of five years was exhausted. Except for the horses, elephants and military equipment necessary for maintaining order and protecting the royal estate, nothing remained. The king freely gave away even his own gems and goods, his clothing and necklaces, earrings, bracelets, chaplets, and bright head jewel.

With nothing left, the king begged his sister for an ordinary second-hand garment, and having put it on, worshipped the Buddhas of the ten regions.

After the magnificent convocation, Hsuan-tsang once again requested leave of Harsha, but again the king asked him to stay on. Hsuan-tsang saw that the king was not willing to let him go and he was full of grief.

"The country of China is very far from here," he said, "and has only recently heard of the Law of the Buddha. Although it has received a general knowledge of the Truth, there is still much that is unknown. I have come here to inform myself on the great Law, and having accomplished my aim, think of how the learned men of my country are longing to understand the depths of Buddhism. I dare not delay a moment, remembering the words of the Sutra: 'Whoever hinders men from a knowledge of religion shall, for generation after generation, be born blind'-if you stop me from leaving, you will cause countless disciples to lose the benefit of a knowledge of the Law. How then will you face the dread of being deprived of sight?"

The king was silent for a few moments before he spoke. "Your humble disciple admires and values the virtues of the Master," he said. "And I will ever look up to and serve him.

I leave the Master to his' choice, to go or to stay."

Hsuan-tsang said that he would like to go, so the king bowed to the wishes of his guest. He offered the monk gifts of money and every kind of valuable, but Hsuan-tsang refused everything. From Kumara, however, he accepted a cape made of coarse skin lined with soft down, which would protect him from the rain whilst on the road.

At the time of farewell, Harsha could not keep back his tears. To speed the monk on his journey, he sent along a great elephant that could carry his entire precious cargo, which consisted of more than six hundred books, beautiful images of the Buddha and his saints in gold, silver, crystal and sandalwood and one hundred and fifty true relics of the Buddha. Harsha also gave the monk three thousand gold and ten thousand silver pieces to meet his expenses along the way.

Three days later, Hsuan-tsang and his party were surprised to see galloping horsemen following them. It was Harsha and Kumara, attended by several hundred cavalry men. They had wanted to see Hsuan-tsang once more. There was another leave-taking and this time Harsha sent four officials with the monk. They carried letters written on fine white cotton material, commanding the rulers of the countries through which Hsuan-tsang would travel to give him relays and escorts. Harsha did whatever he could to help the great Chinese pilgrim on his return to the western border of China.

Hsuan-tsang's return journey to China appears to have been less eventful and far easier, thanks to Harsha's generous help. The monk took a more southernly route,

crossing the Pamirs and passing through Kashgar, Yarkand, Khotan and Lop-nor, to return to China in A.D. 645, mote than fifteen years after he had set off on his pilgrimage.



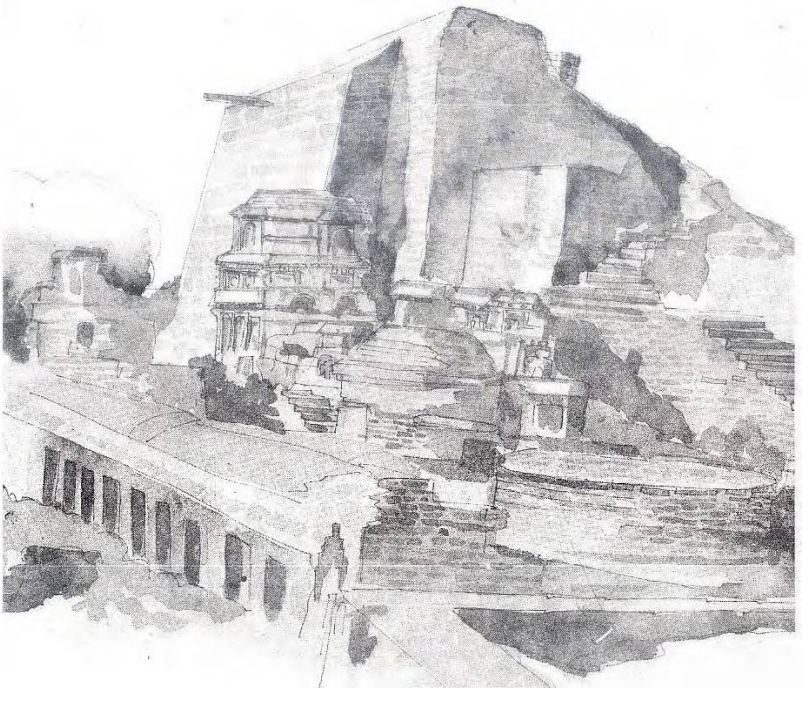
Epilogue

On his arrival in China Hsuan-tsang received an overwhelming welcome. It is said that the emperor and his court, the officials and merchants, and all the people celebrated his return. The streets were festooned with banners and merry music filled the air.

The emperor not only forgave the monk for going abroad without permission, but became his close friend. At Hsuan-tsang's request, the emperor appointed several learned lay scholars and many knowledgeable monks to help in the work of translating, editing and copying the six hundred and fifty-seven sacred books of Buddhism brought from India.

Hsuan-tsang spent the rest of his days in translating and explaining the sacred books. It is said that more than a hundred disciples attended his lectures daily. Despite his many occupations, he worked with the same zeal as when a young man. Hsuan-tsang, a great scholar and traveller, died in A.D. 664, honoured and remembered in many lands.

Printed at India International Press, A-12f1, Narmnalndustrial Area, Ph-I, New Delhi-28





ISBN 81-237-0166-7

NATIONAL BOOK TRUST, INDIA